



Local Government Reform West Northamptonshire Update

February 2019

Here's the latest update on progress developing the proposed new unitary council for west Northamptonshire, covering Daventry District, Northampton Borough and South Northamptonshire areas.

What you can expect as Local Government Reform continues

You may be wondering about the extent of the changes that will be made, should the proposed new unitary authority go live on 1 April 2020 (Vesting Day) and how they will affect the delivery of services.

If the Government does decide to proceed with the proposal (we are expecting their decision later next month), there is not a huge amount of time to bring together the four authorities into a new organisation before Vesting Day.

So the priority for the work ahead must be to ensure the new council is formed with stability and can provide **safe and legal** services on Day One.

This is likely to mean more modest changes by 1 April with most services and employees transitioning to the new organisation unchanged. Full scale transformation of services will be brought to the fore after Vesting Day and from the base of a stable, safe and legal new council.

It is too early to predict the future service changes, but this will become clearer as work progresses on shaping the safe and legal structure of the new council – there will also be regular engagement and consultation as we approach the transitional phase.

Structural Change Orders & Joint Committee Proposals

Daventry District Councillors will be asked to make some important decisions on the Local Government Reform process at this month's Full Council meeting.

Reports on the Structural Changes Order and set up of a Joint Committee are due to be presented at the meeting on 21 February, with the outcomes playing a key role in the preparations for a proposed new unitary council in the West.

Structural Changes Order

If the Government decides to give the proposed new two unitary councils the go-ahead, they will need to make the necessary legislation, including laying a Structural Changes Order (SCO) before both Houses of Parliament.

The councils can make representations to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) about the important details to be included in the Order, such as legal, governance and electoral arrangements for the new council.

The report to Council this month will ask Members to consider whether to make representations to the MHCLG on preferences for the SCO and what these should be.

Whilst the Order will be drafted and finalised by Government officials, it is considered wise and mutually beneficial for the councils to provide their version of a draft Order - and to do so sooner rather than later to have influence. The Councils will likely be invited by Government to formally consider a draft Order in due course.

Joint Committee proposal

This month Council will also be asked to consider a proposal to establish a formal West Northamptonshire Joint Committee between DDC, South Northamptonshire Council, Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council and agree the terms of reference. The Joint Committee is proposed to have a degree of delegated decision-making powers on behalf of the four authorities, to allow for a limited number of formal decisions to be taken before the formation of a shadow authority.

The agenda and reports for Full Council will be available on our website from Wednesday 13 February.

New LGR programme director

We have a new Programme Director for the LGR work across both West and North Northamptonshire.

Keith Cheesman has been the Programme Director in Dorset, from where he is bringing recent and valuable experience of a unitary process, albeit driven by different factors in that area. Keith is finishing his work in Dorset now (their two new unitaries go live in April 2019), but is already working one or two days a week in Northants, and is already making a big and positive impact on the work.



A rule of thumb Keith has already introduced is worth sharing – the scale of the challenge and the time available to us means that ‘we need to do what needs doing, not what makes us feel good’.

Baselining

One major element of activity for the programme is generally focused on establishing the detailed scale of work under way across all eight current authorities, what contracts they have in place, what IT systems they use, where they spend their money, what staff they have where, as well as the volume, frequency and, importantly, the quality of their various services. This data collection is an essential part of the ‘discovery phase’ that in due course will influence how services are brought smoothly together into each new authority. Our approach follows a tried and tested model used previously during the Dorset unitary process.

The pilot baselining exercise in planning will allow necessary tweaks to the baselining process to be made before it is rolled out across every single council service over the coming months. This roll-out will be carried out in waves, so as to make the data collection work manageable.

Response to Government’s formal consultation on Local Government Reorganisation

The Government’s consultation on the proposals for West and North Northants concluded on 25th January. It will take the Government a month or two to read and consider the various

responses they will have received from consultees, including the public, other interested parties, and, of course, councils affected. [You can read DDC's response here](#)

Strategic Design Principle workshops

All councillors from all eight authorities were invited to two seminars in December, at which a lot of learning was shared, including from many other councils who have previously been through a unitarisation process.

Those two days were followed up by two further workshops in January, which have just completed. Smaller affairs, with just 15 people from each authority present – a blend of leading members and a handful of senior officers – these two sessions worked through in detail the creation of a number of Strategic Design Principles.

Once adopted, amended as necessary, these strategic design principles will inform much of the work done by officers to bring back options and recommendations to members, and will support them in due course in making key decisions for the future of the proposed new council. We'll be able to share more detail of these over coming weeks.

Cllr Chris Millar – Leader

Ian Vincent – Chief Executive